

We're writing a sustainability plan for the agency. Join us!

by Jay Shepard, Solid Waste & Financial Assistance Program - HQ

Governor Locke has required every cabinet agency to write a sustainability plan – and that means us, too.

Executive Order 02-03 directed agencies to create plans to reduce the environmental footprint of state government. The plans are due to the Governor's Office on Sept. 1.

In his executive order, the governor proclaimed:

- The state of Washington is committed to the mutually compatible goals of economic vitality, a healthy environment and strong communities;
- Sustainability provides for current needs without sacrificing the needs of future generations;
- Within state government, sustainable practices require decisions based on a systematic evaluation of the long-term effects of an activity or product on health and safety, communities, and the environment and economy of Washington state;
- Reversing the steady decline in the natural resources and ecosystems on which people and economic vitality depend is crucial to our future;
- The regional and global implications of climate change, loss of biological diversity and threats to resources, such as clean water, require us all to examine and change behaviors; and
- State government should model sustainable business practices that contribute to the long-term protection and enhancement of our environment, our economy and the health of current and future generations.

These are very powerful statements, particularly in relation to what we do here at Ecology. While doing our jobs, we are challenged to keep sustainability of our environment in mind.

The governor's goals in relation to sustainability in government practices are:

- Institutionalize sustainability as an agency value;
- Raise employee awareness of sustainable practices in the work place;
- Minimize energy and water use;
- Shift to clean energy for both facilities and vehicles;
- Shift to non-toxic, recycled and remanufactured materials in purchasing and construction;
- Expand markets for environmentally preferable products and services; and
- Reduce or eliminate waste as an inefficient or improper use of resources.

Here at Ecology, this should be music to our collective ears. It also should challenge us to really step back and take a look at how we operate. We need to ask ourselves, "Can we do what we want others to do?"

Below are the draft goals for Ecology's plan. They are long-term, visionary goals that could be realized in 25 to 30 years and are intentionally challenging:

GOAL 1: Ecology models stewardship and sustainability in all of its practices.

As the state's lead environmental-protection agency, the Department of Ecology applies sustainability principles in all of its internal business decisions. In so doing, Ecology has an overall positive effect on the environment, community and economy.

Creating community and fostering healthy community relationships is a significant part of modeling sustainability. Our corporate citizenship is renowned within the communities that we work. Agency management and staff actively participate in community events and civic activities. Community involvement by all employees is encouraged and supported. We are seen as an important and integral entity in the surrounding communities.

GOAL 2: Facilities are integrated into the local environment. Facilities are designed with habitat in mind.

Buildings that Ecology owns or leases are supportive of local ecosystems. The external environment around Ecology facilities provides friendly habitat for all native species. Buildings complement native species habitat and grounds are preserved or restored to native conditions. Grounds are planted with native flora that thrives in the local climates.

During construction of new buildings, native vegetation is minimally disrupted. Native plants are salvaged before excavation and transplanted to a holding nursery until the site-restoration phase of construction. The plants are then used for landscaping. The habitat is restored to a condition that is supportive of native species.

Facilities generate "green" power from on-site sources to meet Ecology's energy needs.

Ecology's facilities are built and or retrofitted with technology that allows us to generate renewable, environmentally safe energy on site to meet both needs of facility operation and mobility. This comes from a variety of potential technologies, such as solar, hydrogen, wind, tidal, gravity, magnetic and ground-source heat. Pneumatics and hydraulics are used to store and release energy. Energy efficiency is routine. Our mobility needs are met through a variety of transportation modes, technological aids and policies that reduce time spent traveling.

Brownfield sites are selected for new facility construction.

Ecology selects land that was previously used, and in some cases contaminated, rather than building on new, undisturbed land. The land is cleaned up and the ecology restored, providing habitat for local flora and fauna, as well as agency employees.

Agency facilities provide a healthful work environment for all employees.

Ecology buildings are designed and managed to provide a work environment for employees that is conducive to optimal performance. The buildings are comfortable, pleasant and clean encouraging maximum creativity, productivity and camaraderie.

GOAL 3: Ecology is a "green consumer."

Ecology purchases environmentally preferable products and services. Life-cycle analyses are used to determine what products are most appropriate and are a requirement in all requests for bids.

Ecology's purchasing power is used to:

- Minimize energy and water use;
- Assure clean energy for both facilities and vehicles;
- Assure use of non-toxic, recycled and remanufactured materials in purchasing and construction;
- Expand markets for environmentally preferable products and services; and
- Reduce or eliminate waste as an inefficient or improper use of resources.

Ecology leases products that are returned to the manufacturer at end of life for de-manufacture/remanufacture.

GOAL 4: Ecology has net positive environmental effects through its business activities.

Ecology has discovered ways to improve environmental quality through its business activities. Mitigation efforts provide for more than is taken. Using environmental design and bio-mimicry strategies, new facilities and facility retrofits contribute positively to the surrounding environment rather than taking away.

Net positive effect on air quality

Air emissions from all Ecology-generated sources are measured and mitigated. Carbon-based fuels are replaced by environmentally benign energy sources.

Net positive effect on water use (quantity) and water disposal (quality)

Water is used efficiently in Ecology facilities. Used water is cleaned on site in created building wetlands. Water is re-used on-site, when possible. Outdoor landscaping is done with native plants that are tolerant of all climate conditions in the local area, needing no additional irrigation. All hardened surfaces have been replaced with permeable materials reducing stormwater run-off. Facilities have been retrofitted with stormwater-collection systems that retain water to meet the minimal irrigation needs of the outdoor environment. The use of water as a waste conveyance is minimized.

In some cases where environmental effects cannot be managed on-site, offsite mitigation is used as counter balance.

Ecology does not generate waste nor does it cause waste to be created.

Material needs are minimal. Ecology models waste-reduction practices by modifying material-intensive processes; modifying material intensive products; improving housekeeping to reduce cross-contamination; and Re-using materials on-site.

The material mass used in Ecology is reduced to a minimum. The materials that we do use in facilities are recycled or composted at the end of their life. Equipment is purchased or leased from vendors that provide end-of-life return for recycling. Products that Ecology produces for distribution are made of materials that are easily recycled or composted or can be returned to

Ecology at end of life for re-use, redistribution, recycling or composting. Products are made from re-usable, recyclable materials that originate from easily renewed resources.

Actions taken by the department do not cause the regulated community, product and service providers, and staff to generate wastes or cause wastes to be generated.

Ecology has embraced the concept of “waste equals food” through adopting materials-management principles. Pollutants are captured and used again or returned to the earth safely as nutrients for the next cycle of life.

Ecology does not use toxic substances.

GOAL 5: Sustainability is integral to our daily work.

Sustainability principles are applied in the course of our daily routine work and in all decision-making. Ecology looks to the purposes and goals established by the legislature in its enabling legislation and the State Environmental Policy Act for its guiding principles. These laws lay out very clearly what we now label as sustainability.

It is in these laws that all our work is rooted. All other statutes have been reviewed and amended to incorporate these principles. The agency’s regulations are updated with sustainability principles in mind.

Vibrant communities and economic development are dependent upon a healthy and functional environment. All employees understand and embrace this concept on the job. They understand our environmental, social and economic systems are intrinsically tied. Ecology’s financial-assistance investments in environmental stewardship and protection are made with the understanding and agreement that economic development will occur. Ecology’s financial services help communities understand local carrying capacity and harmonize development with the environment there they are established.

Ecology has built supportive and collaborative relationships internally and with the public and regulated communities. Mimicking nature, Ecology has become a cooperative, rather than a competitive, organization.

If you have ideas that you would like to share to include in the plan, please share them with Jay Shepard at jshe461@ecy.wa.gov or 360-407-7040.